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ART. VII. — *Life and Complete Works of MARGARET FULLER.*

In 6 vols. Boston : Brown, Taggard, and Chase. 1860.
Uniform Edition.

1. *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli.* By R. W. EMERSON, W. H. CHANNING, and J. F. CLARKE. 2 vols.
2. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century.*
3. *At Home and Abroad: or, Things and Thoughts in America and Europe.*
4. *Art, Literature, and the Drama.*
5. *Life without, and Life within.*

THE horticulturist glows with delight when Nature offers him a new flower. The statelier its aspect, the more intense its tints, the more difficult its culture, the more cordial is his welcome. While its inspiriting fragrance floats through his conservatory, and lifts the very heads of all other plants, hope kindles in his bosom, and every energy is bent to the perfecting of that germ, which is the vehicle of its immortal type, and which shall transmit its grace, its color, and its God-given charm. He does not stay to ask why the stem is coarse and angular, the leaves heavy and viscous, the root moist with a poisonous juice, the calyx set round with thorns; or if he deals with these matters at all, it is to seek their relation to the continuous life of the plant, and not to find fault with the Creator. What precious fluids flow through that angular channel, what honeyed sweets are exhaled through those viscous organs of respiration, what precious medicament lies hidden in the poison, what possible injury to the young germ the thorny crown repels,—these things, indeed, concern him. Would to Heaven that ordinary human creatures stood thus reverent before a new soul, fresh from that Hand which makes and permits no mistakes; that their eyes opened gladly to the unfading beauty of the immortal; and that the angularity, the bitterness, the individual peculiarity or weakness, with which God defends the youth of His best beloved, were heeded only as they reveal the secret of development, or explain the facts of position! Then had we long since ceased to hear of Margaret Fuller's arrogance, conceit, and irreligion,

and recognized her as a noble gift to our time. Now that we have for the first time before us a complete memorial of her, it will be well to review briefly the works which she has left to us,—especially that best of all her works, her life,—and to endeavor, through the pages of this Review, to correct some misapprehensions concerning her which still float on the popular breeze. To those who “wander to and fro on the earth,” fulfilling the varied engagements of the Lyceum, these misapprehensions are familiar as household words. Rumor finished her clumsy work long ago, and it is still too early for the historic sponge to clear the board. “Show us anything that Margaret has left, as fine as many of the things that have been said of her, and we will put faith in your vindication,” said once an intelligent clergyman who should have known better. Is it nothing, then, to prompt to the saying of fine things? “This is the method of genius,” Margaret writes, “to ripen fruit for the crowd, by those rays of whose heat they complain.”

The two volumes of *Memoirs*, now republished, contain, beside the original matter, a touching life of Margaret's mother, from the pen of her son Richard, and a genealogical record of the Fuller family, which doubtless indicates the force and quality of that blood. It seems to us that the editor is unnecessarily anxious to efface the impression that his father's discipline was so severe as to overtax even Margaret's precocity. In her *Autobiography*, a species of writing for which she was admirably qualified by nature, she left on record, in regard to this matter, precisely the statement which she desired should survive. Does the editor call the *Autobiography* a romance? Very well. In its pages the writer sought to convert her own personal experience to universal use. “A more than ordinarily high standard was presented me,” she wrote. “My father's influence upon me was great, but opposed to the natural unfolding of my character, which was fervent, of strong grasp, and disposed to infatuation and self-forgetfulness.” To foster these peculiarities would have been a worse service than the overstraining, whose results, it seems to us, Margaret naturally enough misjudged, while, by the thorough discipline he maintained, Mr. Fuller

brought an influence to bear on her "infatuation," the benefits of which she never ceased to feel, and came ultimately to understand. With her nightmares and somnambulisms, also, this severe *régime* and excessive study had little to do. They belong to such natures as hers. They are a part of the dreamy "self-forgetfulness"; and if an occasional indiscretion added to their horrors, they could not have been wholly escaped, under the most tender indulgence, by one of her class. If not overworked by requirements from without, a mind like hers must have overwrought itself. Madame de Staël wrote standing, that she might not seem to be disturbed when her autocratic father entered her apartment. A gifted woman of the present century spent three years of her youth in copying mercantile letters, the only curb her merchant-father could find for an ideality which he did not comprehend. For all such natures, God provides such discipline. It may look harsh. We can trust Him, that it shall prove wise.

None but poets remember their youth, and we prize this autobiographical fragment more than most else of what Margaret has left us. Very beautiful is the conception of the Memoir, a threefold, yet concurrent testimony, which serves to show her many-sided nature. Very grateful ought our public to be to Mr. Clarke, for the crystalline clearness with which he sets before them the story of his intercourse with his friend. He feels his obligations, and with graceful, manly self-reliance acknowledges them. To her other biographers she ministered delight, to him growth. They stood admiring; he felt the woman in the genius. "This record," he says, "may encourage some youthful souls, as earnest and eager as ours, to trust themselves to their heart's impulse, and enjoy some such blessing as came to us." He will never know how many. Nowhere does the remarkable simplicity of her relations with men and women appear to such advantage as in his pages. Not a shadow of coquetry nor mist of passion hovers over the record. Impetuosity, ardor, and high resolve gleam through the rifts of the correspondence, and grant us clear guesses at what we do not see.

The most common charge brought against Margaret is that of arrogance, — a charge which had some show of truth in it, both

as concerns her own peculiarities, and in regard to the temperament which she inherited ; but who are we that bring this charge, and what true significance has it ? May we not be tale-bearers, censorious, meddlers in other men's matters ? and if so, what is the significance of that fact ? For us and her abides the old eternal law. She was human, unlikely therefore to show us perfection, either inherited or attained in the life that now is. The only profitable question is, Did she accept, foster, hug to her bosom her own frailties, or did she in the main, at all events ultimately, see their true nature, and put them under subjection ? To this question there can be but one answer. From a manuscript for some time in our possession, we copy the following statement—a very fair one it seems to us—of the impression she sometimes made upon truly noble souls.

“ My nature would always have resented the assumption of superiority ; but gladly would I have knelt before the humblest human creature in whom I perceived it. Many a pure-hearted child has bent the knee which only stiffened before Margaret, and this, not because I was not willing to acknowledge her fine ability, her great superiority, but because I knew the highest crown we could either of us inherit, it depended upon our own wills to wear,—because I felt myself as much the child of my Heavenly Father as she. To become truly regal, in my eyes, she must have relinquished the love of power for its own sake, must stretch out generous, sustaining tendrils towards feebler souls. In fine, must break up ‘her court,’ and enter ‘society.’ If there was anything in my own temper which bore a likeness to her faults, I only felt, on that account, how necessary it was that she should hold them, as I was trying to hold mine, ‘under her heel.’ Margaret was, even then, at times, beautifully tender and considerate, but it was from the height of her queenliness that she was so. Her possibilities enthralled me, but never her actual self.”

This statement, nowhere so distinctly made in the *Memoirs*, but involved in facts to which they bear witness, may for the sake of truth be made once, but for the sake of all honor and nobleness it should be for ever after set aside. We balance it, first, by her own words concerning Carlyle, showing how much more just she could be to others than we are to her, and then by the prayer which Mr. Channing quotes from her *Diary*, under date of the very hour which rang with complaints of her conceit and coldness.

“His arrogance,” she says of Carlyle, “does not in the least proceed from an unwillingness to allow freedom to others. No man would more enjoy a manly resistance. It is the habit of a mind accustomed to follow its own impulse, as a hawk does its prey. He is indeed arrogant and overbearing, but in his arrogance there is no trace of littleness or self-love. It is in his nature, in the untamable energy that has given him power to crush the dragons.”

All this was true of her who wrote it, and who, at the moment of misapprehension, wrote also this truly Christianlike prayer: “Father, let me not injure my fellows during this period of repression. I feel that, when we meet, my tones are not so sweet as I would have them. O let me not wound! I who know so well how wounds can burn and ache should not inflict them. Let my touch be light and gentle. Let me not fail to be kind and tender when need is.” Here her keen intellectuality detected a pharisaic satisfaction in the very humility of her petition, and her truth breaks through to close in these words: “Yet I would not assume an overstrained poetic magnanimity. Help me to do *just right*, and no more.” Do the records of womanhood show us a finer instance of self-knowledge and humble seeking?

Next to be considered is the common charge of an irreligious character. This the volumes before us by no means rebut in so forcible a manner as could be wished. Mr. Clarke’s expression of “*almost* Christian” when he speaks of her aim in self-culture, Mr. Emerson’s evident want of faith in her religious experiences, of a nature which it was impossible he should understand, and his dwelling so long upon her belief in demonology and fate, in omens and presentiments, have done much to strengthen the popular mistake. She had a Goethe-like faculty of seeming and being all things to all men. The being hardly lived to whom she would have breathed her vital religious experiences in all their force. To the cold and flippant,—before the merely intellectual or philosophic,—she was dumb as death. When she presented to an observer a single glittering surface, she was necessarily misunderstood. She forgot her own past, and did not pause to explain changes. In his usual spirit of fairness, Mr. Emerson offers us the key to the riddle, so far as it concerns himself.

“The religious nature remained unknown to you,” Margaret writes, “because it would not proclaim itself, but claimed to be divined. The deepest soul that approached you was, in your eyes, nothing but a magic lantern.”

It seems to us that Mr. Clarke came nearer to her personally than any of her biographers; and if so, it was on account of the deep religious glow in his own soul, which hers answered with a faint, but decided reflection. He undoubtedly strove to make the truth manifest in this regard, and failed not for lack of material,—for there is an abundance in his pages,—but from some accidental inability to marshal it in effective array. The book followed, as most memoirs do now-a-days, too soon after the death of its subject, and could not meet a public prejudice, not as yet fully recognized.

Margaret's profound truthfulness was religious in its very nature, and she herself perceived the relation. Truth is God-like to our human view; and she expressed an underlying and shaping fact of her own inward life when she wrote, “The man of truth, that is, of God.” “She had so profound a faith in truth, that thoughts to her were things,” writes Mr. Clarke; and because they were of the essence of God himself, she dealt with them so subtilely, so earnestly, and so unsparingly. It was religious aspiration which spoke in her when she wrote, “No fortunate purple isle exists for me now, and all these hopes and fancies are lifted from the sea into the sky.” “Never was my mind so active,” she writes a little afterward, “and the subjects are God, the universe, and immortality.” Are we to believe that she thought of such things in vain? If her religious instincts failed anywhere, at first, it was in practical recognition of the brotherhood of man; but the walls of Sing-Sing and the pavements of the Roman hospitals cry out with later answers to that charge. One friend she gladly sought for his “compact, thoroughly-considered views of God and the world.” “Tangible promises, well-defined hopes, are things of which I do not now feel the need,” she wrote once; and on the next page, “Blessed Father! lead me any way to truth and goodness, but if it might be, I would not pass from idol to idol. Lead me, my Father, enable me to root out pride and selfishness.”

"Margaret, has God's light dawned on your soul?" some friend questions; and she answers, with a truly Christian humility, "I think it has." Indeed, so far from being irreligious, it might almost be said of her, from the testimony of these pages, that she received a sudden illumination, and was converted in the stricter evangelical sense of the word. It was in experiences like this that Emerson put no faith. Their ecstasy did not suit his cool head, and, in her periods of bitterest anxiety for her husband and child, she wrote from Italy that his fears were justified. Her faith had not lasted. But her own words, written at such a moment, must not be allowed to condemn her. If such feelings sometimes flicker, as we all know, they are none the less real on that account,—they are the seed of a yet profounder experience. It is our human weakness which cries out in Gethsemane, and children of God we still are, whether we can read our family name or not. "I thought I should die," she wrote after her sickness at Groton; "but I was calm, and looked to God, without fear. Nothing sustains me now but the thought of God, who saw fit to restore me to life, when I was very willing to leave it. I shall be obliged to give up selfishness in the end. May God enable me to see the way clear." When she wrote this, she was not accusing herself of any low form of selfishness, only of that intense desire of self-culture which possessed her like a demon, and which it was the will of God, working through circumstances, perpetually to thwart. "I have faith," she says again, "in a glorious explanation, which shall make manifest perfect justice and wisdom." "I reverence the serenity of a truly religious mind so much, that I think I may attain to it." "Like Timon, I have liked to give, not so much from beneficence as from restless love. I return to Thee, my Father, from the husks that have been offered me. But I return as one who *meant not* to leave Thee." In July, 1838, she says: "I partook to-day, for the first time, of the Lord's supper. I had often wished to do so." Were these the utterances of an irreligious spirit? Nay, they came from a profoundly religious spirit, yet one far too individual, to accept commonplace conclusions, or to be content with a second-hand faith. Very slowly did this side of her nature develop, but with

soundness and entire freedom. Could she have seen as little children see, when she so bitterly regretted her defeated hope of visiting Europe, she would have known that in all earthly experience, whether of travel, or of artistic or literary culture, there is but one end to be gained,—an end which God inevitably secures for every human soul, though he may sometimes postpone it; and in this faith, every thwarted purpose glows in the light of hope.

Too much is said in these volumes of her own dissatisfaction at her lack of personal charms. She herself said, and said truly, that this was “mere superficial, temporary tragedy!”

It surprises us, also, that one of her biographers should expect impossibilities of her. Strange he thinks it, that she had not studied the natural sciences, and could write only vapid descriptions of “skyscape.” But it was never in her to observe or to criticise Nature or Art for itself alone. The subtle change of air, earth, and sea, she heeded only as the æsthetic influence stole over her, and then she described, not Nature’s change, but the soothing, recreating power of Nature over the human soul.

“It remains to say,” says Emerson, and we say with him, “that all these powers and accomplishments found their best and only adequate channel in her conversation,—a conversation which those who have heard it unanimously, so far as I know, pronounced to be in elegance, in range and flexibility and adroit transition, in depth, in cordiality, and in moral aim, altogether admirable, surprising, and cheerful as a poem, and communicating its own civility and elevation like a charm to all hearers.”

In the third volume of the present series is published “Woman in the Nineteenth Century;” several papers concerning woman and her interests; and some letters from and concerning Margaret, which would more properly have been included in the Memoirs. Some of these last show her religious feeling and her sweet womanliness in so bright an aspect, that we would gladly quote them. “Woman in the Nineteenth Century” is, perhaps, more widely known than any of her works. We shall avoid any lengthened criticism of it, because it must open a discussion of the still unfolding “Woman Question,” for which we have neither space nor

time. It is doubtless the most complete, brilliant, and scholarly statement ever made upon this subject. Its terse epigrammatic sentences have furnished more than one watchword to the reformers with whom the author herself was never associated. The book is interesting as the strongest expression of the aggressive and reformatory element in her. She was interested in the social pioneers of whom she often spoke lightly, and it was reserved for Italy to teach her the practical value of an abstract idea. In the Preface to this volume, the editor bears touching testimony to her domestic virtues.

The fourth volume contains "Summer on the Lakes,"—her "Letters from Europe to the Tribune," giving the details of Italian politics,—some letters to friends, portions of which had been already incorporated into her *Memoirs*,—and details of the fatal shipwreck. "Summer on the Lakes" has long been one of our favorite summer classics. It first won us, not more by the vital individuality and grace of the style, in which it stands alone among her lighter works, than by the beauty of the little brown etchings with which her friend Miss Clarke adorned the first edition. In the matter of style, it was Margaret's peculiarity to have none when she spoke from her memory. The narrative portions of her "Letters from Abroad," for example, might just as well have been written by any one else. But once arouse her heart and mind, and out flowed the personality! Let her speak of Mazzini, or describe a fringed flower in the moonbeams, and no one could mistake the author. This volume is especially interesting, as containing all that remains of her Italian experience, her complete work on "Italy" having shared, to our bitter regret, her own fate.

"Art, Literature, and the Drama," is a reprint of the volume which she published on the eve of her departure for Europe. A friendly gift to those she was leaving, it proved, in many respects, the most popular thing she had printed,—and deservedly, for her mind was eminently critical. She was often misled in her first judgment, as in one well-known instance, by the strength of her affection and her sympathy; but let the merit be real, and of a kind which she was glad to recognize, and no one ever did more exquisite justice to

thought and to its form. Every word which she ever wrote of Goethe was admirable, and yet what we possess was only *her preparation* for better work. Nothing was ever more tender and true than her sketch of "The Two Herberts" in this volume. Let the reader dwell also on what she has to say of "American Literature," and the "Lives of the Great Composers."

The closing volume of this series, entitled, "Life without and Life within," strikes us as the most interesting portion of her miscellaneous writings, and its contents are almost entirely new to the public. Here we have the best of what remained about Goethe, — pleasant criticisms, and ideal sketches of various kinds, — appeals for the unhappy also, and words which, if the fault-finders will but read them, will show, not merely her spiritual capacity, but, in some respects, the measure of her attainment.

It is impossible, in closing, to criticise these works as they deserve. We repeat what is well known, and has been often said, that their *suggestiveness* is their chief and perpetual charm. No one can read attentively what she wrote, without learning to think for himself. The difference between her written works and her marvellous conversation was well indicated by a compliment paid by the Comte de Ségur to Madame de Staël. "Tell me, Count," she asked in a vivacious moment, "which do you like best, my conversation or my printed works?" "Your conversation, Madame," was the immediate reply, "for it does not give you leisure to become obscure."

Some poems are added to the last volume, and these have been severely criticised. It is quite probable that Margaret never would have published them, — that she would have said of them at last, what she wrote at the first, that her verses were merely "vents for her personal experience." Nevertheless, let them be as faulty in artistic form as the critics would represent them, we are glad to have them, as revelations of her inward life. She wrote never a word to be spared. We feel an unbounded confidence in her, and we thank her brother for sharing in it. One of these poems, at least, seems to us to have exquisite truth and beauty, both in thought and form.

We refer to the "Lines" addressed to the lady who illustrated her "Summer on the Lakes."

These volumes are stereotyped clearly, on good paper, in tasteful array. Yet one criticism upon their form we cannot withhold. We deeply regret that all the biographical matter was not thrown together, according to its period, even if Appendix after Appendix had been thus made needful. It is further a matter of regret, that the essays themselves are not dated. We are quite aware that this is not usual; but in this particular case their psychological value would have been much increased by such a means of tracing development. We should have been glad to extract largely from these volumes; but to do it, we must have resigned all hope of speaking at length in regard to Madame Ossoli's personal character, which we were unwilling to pass without our tribute of sincere, yet we trust not indiscriminating, respect and gratitude.

We could hardly believe, till we had turned the six volumes over repeatedly, that the only portrait offered in this complete edition is one from the picture painted by Hicks, during the last few months of her life in Rome. It was well to have this preserved, for there is great ideality and sweetness in the expression,—a certain look we always hoped would dawn and nestle there. Those who saw her after a mother's hope had risen in her heart say that this was a good likeness; but we cannot but miss the old portrait, published, we think, in a former edition of "Woman in the Nineteenth Century." If the later portrait gives an idea of more personal beauty than Margaret possessed, it wholly fails of that majestic, Juno-like curve of the throat, which was more than beauty. If it was, as in the engraved countenance now given us, that her eyes dilated and her lips grew tender when she gazed upon the wounded men in those Italian hospitals, let us know it; but we cannot be satisfied to possess only a likeness which not one of her early friends would recognize.